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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses issues in the education of teachers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) who intend to use their training as missionaries. The issues arose as a result of one teacher trainer's experience in a community that holds the headquarters of a fundamentalist religious sect. First, the relationship of western linguistics and religion is examined from a historical perspective. Then the current state of training of missionary students and the psychology and history of Christian missions are reviewed, drawing on previous research. Recent responses of foreign countries and governments to missionary activities, considered illegal in some countries, are also discussed. Implications of these policies and concerns for language teaching are examined, including ethics and ESOL teacher professionalism in the context of illegal missionary work, in which the teacher may be at considerable risk. The paper proposes that ESOL teacher training for the purpose of such work lies in an ethical grey area and that the issue should be addressed in the teacher-preparation classroom. Two ways of viewing this issue are explored, one characterized as linguistic imperialism and the other as linguistic/cultural evolution. The responsibility of the missionary in each is examined. Contains 24 references. (MSE)

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Teachers or Missionaries?
Duality of Purpose for ESOL Professionals

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This paper is based on my experiences over the last three years as a teacher trainer in a TESOL program at Southwest Missouri State University. I soon realized in my capacity at SMSU, located in Springfield, the headquarters of a fundamentalist religious sect, that many students were in my classes because they desired to become missionaries. At first this disturbed me greatly, but then I decided to investigate the issue as neutrally as I count and from several points of view. This paper is a result of my initial look into this issue and may not contain my final views on the subject.

I. Western Linguistics and Religion

Throughout history, the connectedness of religious issues and linguistic issues has been pervasive. Creation myths around the world contain not only symbolic accounts of how the world came into being, but also how language originated. In the major linguistic traditions, the earliest linguistic activity that we know of was almost always related to religious issues. Often this activity concerned sacred texts such as in India and in the Hebrew and Arab linguistic traditions. Linguistic inquiry can also be seen as an outgrowth of religious philosophical thought,

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for example, in Classical Greece and the Chinese linguistic tradition (Robins).

The contact established between Europe and the western hemisphere brought European languages and religion to the Americas, where they began displacing and disrupting native languages and religions. In fact, in 1492, a counselor advised Queen Isabella, "Language has always been the consort of empire, and forever shall remain its mate" (Phillipson 31). In the opposite direction, many new peoples and languages came to Europeans' notice. Missionaries sent to the West immersed themselves in indigenous languages, devising orthographies, dictionaries, or grammars for such languages as Quechua.

Bible translation was important from the Renaissance onwards after Martin Luther translated the Bible into German and the Bible was translated into other European vernaculars at this time. Translation continued in the 19th and 20th centuries, and in 1935 the Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics began their work with hundreds of languages around the world. This work has also led to the development of translation theory, particularly by Eugene Nida.

II. Training of Missionary Students Today, and the Psychology and History of Christian Missions

Missionary activity continues to this day, of course involving language in one way or another. For example, a Bible school in Springfield requires all its mission majors to take a three-hour course in English as a Second Language and to study a

language of a country they may be assigned to.

At this point I'd like to discuss some mission psychology and history, drawing my information from the dissertation in the sociology of missions by Jack Nelson, later published as a book in 1992. Nelson gives a clear background of missionizing thought, depending on William Hutchison's work on the sociology of missions, especially of Evangelical missions:

> *Hutchison (1987) suggests a typology for understanding changes in the development of mission theory by noting shifts in attitudes held by missionaries regarding both the cultures of the peoples they missionized among and assessments they held of their own (i.e., Western) culture. Hutchison speaks of this as the "Christ-and-culture problem." Beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century, there was near unanimous high regard for Western culture among missionaries: It was considered to enjoy divine blessing and to represent an emerging "Christian civilization." On the other hand, considerable disdain for foreign, "pagan" cultures existed. Mission theories diverged as missionaries adopted varying assessments of the potential threats emerging from aspects of their own culture that were considered to be antithetical to religious belief (i.e., secularism and materialism) and greater appreciation for the potentials in other cultures.*
>
> *In this respect, Hutchinson speaks of a move from a "Christ-and-culture" posture toward a "Christ, not culture" position among missionaries who believed that Christianity*

could be propagated without cultural trappings to become a culture-transforming influence in other societies. (11-12)

Nelson points out that in this particular instance (central Africa), missionaries were unaware of how the Africans were already being transformed by imperialism, especially be economic forces. In fact, it was these very aspects of Western society that many missionaries were hoping to escape by working in a precapitalist society. Nelson writes:

> *For Fundamentalist missionaries like those investigated in this study, "primitive" cultures (i.e. precapitalist societies) were often viewed somewhat romantically as being free from Western secularism and thus more fertile ground for planting the Gospel message. It seems to have been their understanding that religious beliefs in these societies were not so integral to the culture that they could not be displaced by Christianity, while much of the rural simplicity of such a society, shorn of its "pagan" aspects, could be preserved intact. New Christian cultures could be created, free from the secularism and materialism that had proved so challenging to the religious enterprise in the West.* (14)

Nelson quotes Marvin Markowitz on the paradoxical situation that Fundamentalist missionaries went into:

> *"The missionaries were part of Western civilization, yet they saw themselves apart from it. They desired its benefits both for themselves and their converts, but desired them devoid of the tensions and conflicts that Western*

nations often experiences. They apparently failed to realize that the innocence of the pastoral life could not persist when confronted by the modernizing process of which they themselves were a part. their desires were at once romantic and irreconcilable." (15)

These attitudes affected how the teaching of English was regarded. In at least part of East Africa, missionaries were hostile to teaching English, preferring to use local languages "so that Africans would not gain disturbing ideas and entertain dangerous ambitions" (Beidelman 22). In this example, when English was introduced into mission schools, it did so because of government pressure (113).

III. Recent Responses of Foreign Countries and Governments to Missionizing

As you perhaps gleaned from he description above of African missionary activity in the 1950s, conflicts that the missionary movement was a part of helped fuel the independence movement in this example of Zaire in the early 1960s. Similar reactions to the efforts of the Christian missions, sometimes related to language activity, occurred elsewhere throughout that decade and continue to this day, as missionaries may cause problems for people and governments even to the extent that they are murdered and their activities prohibited. Let me give a few examples:

SIL has been criticized:

. . . in several Latin American countries, because of suspicion that they are paving the way for American

> *commercial interests, and failing to meet the needs of the indigenous groups they are ostensibly helping via a programme of alphabetization and conversion. . . . Even if the missionaries themselves have the best of intentions, and have been instrumental in alphabetizing some threatened languages, structurally they are cultural imperialists.* (Phillipson 32; 106)

The negative response against other missionizing activity continues today. In March, 1990, in the Israeli-designated "security zone" in southern Lebanon, a 59-year-old independent missionary who had established an orphanage was shot to death inn his home by masked gunmen. the statement released by the gunmen's group stated that the missionary had been killed to "deter the establishment of Zionist settlements in southern Lebanon" ("Workers Killed" 41).

In September 1992, three men who worked for the Far East Broadcasting Company were gunned down in their studio in the Philippines. One of the murdered men was a Protestant minister and a radio host who had received death threats over the previous year because of his "preaching about Jesus on the air" ("Briefly Noted" 77).

When U.S. troops were in Somalia recently, several events occurred as a result of missionizing efforts around Christmas celebrations in 1993. A Muslim group "accused United Nations workers and aid groups of passing out Bibles in the Somali language and distributing items prohibited by Islam, including pornography, alcohol, pork, and hashish." A written warning from

the group included "Anybody who tries to distribute anything concerning Christianity will be shot" ("Western Charities" np).

Missionizing efforts have been especially stepped up in countries in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union where the influx is not always welcome. In January 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin complained to visiting American President Clinton that "Russians, with the help of Christian missionaries, were becoming too religious. 'You are a Christian' he said. 'What do I do about this? We need to put a stop to all this'" ("Clinton Sticks Up" 12). And earlier, in 1992, what was "supposed to be the largest evangelistic event ever organized in Russia involving both Orthodox and Protestant churches" was suddenly refused endorsement by the Russian Orthodox Church. The change-of-mind by the Russian Orthodox Church was caused by their negative views of "missionary efforts by outside groups" ("Witnessing" 77).

Perhaps the biggest problems, though, have occurred in the People's Republic of China over the past few years since that country has pursued economic growth, which has been accompanied by an interest in religions. While the Chinese constitution guarantees religious freedom, the government has declared that religious activity must get their approval: "Preachers are not allowed to hold services at unregistered locations or use unauthorized tapes and reading materials from overseas" (WuDunn A3). In 1992 authorities launched a "significant and widespread" crackdown on unofficial house churches, "resulting in hundreds of arrests and numerous reports of Christians being intimidated,

harassed, and beaten" (Wark 54). Foreigners who are discovered to have been proselytizing are often expelled from the country or imprisoned (Tyler).

IV. TESOL and Ethics

So how is this a language issue? Let's look at the example of China. In the past, missionaries often had language training as part of their training, and this is still the case for those who wish to go to many countries of the world. However, in a country like China today where the government has cracked down on religious activities, would-be missionaries go into that country as teachers with regular teaching credentials and with no visible tie to a legally sanctioned church; once there, they go about proselytizing privately, against the laws of that country ("Foreigners Face").

As I said at the beginning of this paper, finding this out about students in my TESOL classes disturbed me, and so I began to look for information about any ethical guidelines or articles in TESOL journals or from the TESOL organization. I found a short 1993 article by Steve Roberts, "Ethical Professionalism and the Field of TESOL."

Although he acknowledges that defining the term "ethics" is especially problematic in contemporary society, Roberts suggests that we can identify "applied ethics" in which he includes three practical aspects such as "ways in which the . . . questions encountered in work situations can be recognized and resolved" (63-64).

In regard to professionalism, Roberts suggests two types, "outer" and "inner." Outer categories, defined as "the socially-recognized, signs of professional status," are comprised of six aspects, such as "a knowledge of a particular field . . . ; A level of commonality in the training required, . . . and a formalized code of ethics and performance standards" (64).

Inner aspects of professionalism are defined as "those held by the individual directly"; these include "a spirit of inquiry and a sense of personal, objective non-involvement"; "reflective self-monitoring of one's own professional behavior"; and "a fundamental, personal orientation toward the public welfare, rather than individual gain" (64).

Thus, Roberts defines the term "ethical professionalism" as "that occupation state, attitude, and behavior which conforms to both the inner and outer characteristics" (64). The second part of Roberts' article then explores the implication of ethical professionalism for TESOL. In answer to the question, Is there a need for ethical professionalism in TESOL?, Roberts states that the very name of TESOL "implies an integral cross-cultural context, one in which lurk moral and ethical issues" (65). In the political arena, Roberts points out that TESOL "has now become a key point of overseas development programs" and thus "constitutes an intrinsically political act" with "far-reaching implications" (66).

Roberts then discusses the final issue of whether the inner aspects of professionalism are addressed adequately in TESOL preparation programs. His concern is that they are not, and he

suggests that a reflective approach on the "ethical dilemmas that 'come with the job' in TESOL," perhaps using a case-study approach as is used in other professions. Roberts argues:

> *If the ethical dilemmas inherent to TESOL are never examined in the classroom, will they have a tendency to remain unexamined as the teacher goes out into the field? Human nature being what it is, there is legitimate reason to think that this would indeed be the case. Future teachers must be made aware that ethical problems do exist in the field of TESOL, what the nature of those problems are, and that coping with them can take . . . positive forms.* (68)

My conclusion for my own ethical dilemma? Students who obtain TESOL training to the extent required for any type of certification or licensure in order to do illegal missionizing work are at the very least in an ethical "gray area" on several counts. Accepting Roberts' characterization of professionalism, I feel these students are perhaps lacking on several counts of inner professionalism: a spirit of inquiry; a sense of personal, objective non-involvement; and a reflective self-monitoring of their own professional behavior. My conclusion, therefore, is that this particular ethical issue, along with others, should definitely be addressed in the teacher-preparation classroom, in the manner Roberts suggests.

V. Two Theoretical Ways of Viewing this Issue

Having reached the above specific conclusion on ethics about missionary students getting TESOL training for the express

purpose of gaining admittance into a foreign country illegally, the bigger issue, missionary work, remains, and I'd like to examine two theoretical ways of viewing the issue of TESOL and cultural missionizing. The first can be called "linguistic imperialism," based on the title of the book by Robert Phillipson. The second I will coin myself as "linguistic/cultural evolution."

One way of viewing the spread of U.S. and European culture--especially religion and language in the current context--is as imperialism, as Phillipson argues. Far from being just a language issue, English language teaching is "an international activity with political, economic, military, and cultural implications and ramifications" (8).

This model is closely tied to the concept of endangered languages and language death. For example, Hale et al. in a 1992 article in *Language* acknowledged that although "language loss has been a reality throughout history" (1), the current spread of English will contribute to the predicted death of perhaps 50% of the world's estimated 6,000 languages within the coming century (5-6). They argue further:

> *Language loss in the modern period is of a different character, in its extend and in its implication. It is part of a much larger process of loss of cultural and intellectual diversity in which politically dominant languages and cultures simply overwhelm indigenous local languages and cultures, placing them in a condition which can only be described as embattled.* (1)

Those supporting this view of linguistic imperialism argue that for the sake of linguistic diversity, efforts should be made to stem the spread of English and thus the loss of language, pointing out that much cultural knowledge is lost when a language dies.

The spread of religion can of course be seen in the same light, as threatening indigenous religions. This situation is rightly considered a tragic one, and I believe we are right to lament the impending loss of both languages and religions, as well as to do what we can to promote all sorts of diversity.

Yet, is this the only possible response to the spread of Western languages and religions? I want to suggest that the imperialism view is perhaps partially flawed because it ignores some basic aspects of culture, and its view of the past and future, as well as of people, is too narrow and static. The second approach "linguistic/cultural evolution," is a view that tries to address these flaws.

We know that language and religion are not monolithic or static; rather, both exhibit great variety and both are dynamic cultural processes. By this I mean that a religion or language that is transplanted or borrowed to a new area will take on characteristics of the people who have adapted it, receiving aspects of the people's previous language and religion. All languages and religions change over time and fill the purposes for which people need them. In other words, both become nativized, and are pluricentric (Kachru 159). Furthermore, change not only brings bad results but good as well.

Let's look at some examples of this in religion.

The southern Mexican state of Chiapas has made headlines in the past year. In one new article, the region is described as "nominally Catholic" although more accurately described as "Christopagan," that is, "a form of Catholicism with aspects of animism and layers of ancient religious tradition" (Woehr 68). So we see an example of how a new, transplanted religion, Catholicism, only merged with older traditions, not supplanted them.

Many Chiapans have converted to Protestant religions--perhaps between 35 and 50 percent of the population. Is this good or bad? On the one hand, many have become empowered and are standing up to authority, refusing to support the local traditional leaders, who are sometimes corrupt. On the other hand, many have been evicted from their villages, some have been killed. Presently a positive result has been "the formation of a Protestant-Catholic committee to study the issue and work toward resolution" (69). So, it's difficult to see this as simply a matter of good or bad, indigenous or Western.

Other evidence of this same process abounds.

This report is from China:

> *Christianity's rapid growth, however, has clearly outstripped the church's ability to disciple its new converts. High levels of illiteracy among rural church members and a lack of theologically trained teachers have given rise to a dangerous upswing in the number of indigenous heretical movements.*

"In many rural areas, the churches are growing quickly, but the people are often uneducated peasants, with backgrounds steeped in folk religion, ancestor worship, Buddhism, and the occult," said China expert Anthony P.B. Lambert. (Wark 61)

Or another report from China:

The attraction of Christianity to many Chinese seems to be that it offers something to believe in at a time when faith in Communism and Maoism has collapsed. . . .

Buddhism and traditional folk religion--belief in the Kitchen God, the God of Wealth, and so on--are also gaining adherents for the same reasons. Many Chinese are all encompassing in their faith, figuring that the more gods they pray to, the better the odds that one or another will respond. . . .

Christianity also has the attraction of being linked to the exotic Occident. to many young Chinese, church is "cool." Crosses have even become chic as pendants for young people.

"Lots of us think those churches look so interesting and solemn, so mysterious!" said a young Beijing journalist, fingering the golden cross dangling from a chain around her neck. (Kristof 17)

News articles also report that the missionary business itself is being taken over by peoples in the Third World, who are eager to spread their own brand of Christianity; for one thing, they are usually much cheaper to maintain than traditional

missionaries:

> *While a traditional missionary family of four may need to raise $50,000 for their first year in the field, many Third World missionaries are sent out with little, if any, money and few tools. African Enterprise in southern Africa sends two-person evangelistic teams with $50 and the clothes on their backs.* (Tapia 64)

The same is evidenced in Russia where one person says, "it is the Russian believer who should work for Russia. . . . Let us be the ones to do it" (Framm 56).

In conclusion, the linguistic imperialism view only works if we view people in the Third World still as victims as First World imperialism or as empty, brainless people, incapable of linguistic or cultural creativity to make their language and religion their own. When I think of this view, I wonder if it isn't us in the West speaking out against imperialism who have rather paternalistic and simplistic views of the very people whose languages and religions we are trying to "protect."

Peter Ladefoged expresses this very view in his response to Hale et al.:

> *It is paternalistic of linguistics to assume that they know what is best for the community. . . .*
>
> *The world is remarkably resilient in the preservation of diversity; different cultures are always dying while new ones arise. They may not be based on ethnicity or language, but the differences remain. Societies will always produce subgroups who think and behave in different ways. In the*

popular view the world is becoming more homogeneous, but that my be because we are not seeing the new differences that are arising. (810)

When I think of how we Western linguists and language teachers are concerned about the disappearance of indigenous languages, religions, and cultures, I can't help wondering if perhaps we aren't like the missionaries in the 1950s whose desire to work in precapitalist societies backfired on them in some ways. Perhaps our desires on this issue, like theirs, can be described as "at once romantic and irreconcilable" (Nelson 15). I can't help but wonder if we aren't perhaps the ones with the colonial views. Nelson quotes Markowitz on this:

> *"[The missionaries'] hope was that in Africa (or Asia or Oceania or elsewhere) Christianity would come to full fruition. for many missionaries, therefore, more was at stake than the conversion of the heathen. The convert often became the vehicle for the fulfillment of the missionary's own dreams and for the resolution of his psychological and social conflicts. If an African Christian failed to live up to the principles, values, and ethics of Christianity as conveyed by the missionary, he was not merely harming himself; in the eyes of the missionary, he was betraying a much deeper trust. Converts thus came to be burdened--often unbeknownst to themselves--with an impossible responsibility."* (15)

To sum up, then, on the one hand, we have the original teacher/missionary issue I describe which I suggest is an ethical

problem because of the illegal and secretive way it is being gone about and the very real danger that might come to such teachers or their students as a result. On the other hand, I want to say that missionizing activity, by itself, does not need to be seen totally in a negative light, that we should also examine our own patronizing views of religious and linguistic spread.

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